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mum bonum. Ultimately, however, this religious presence only illuminates Thomas's failure to plausibly connect sources and metanarrative. When Thomas metanarrates, there is seldom acknowledgment that Christianity changed with the age, or that this-worldly engagement and other-worldly hope were often profoundly intertwined, even though many of Thomas's own sources suggest just such a conclusion.

Thomas's final chapter, "Fame and the Afterlife," builds to the conclusion that, "in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Christian religion, in its various forms, continued to enjoy cultural ascendancy in England. Its message remained the traditional one, namely that it was to the next world, not this one, that human beings should look for their fulfillment. In practice, most of the population implicitly took a more secular view: they cherished life for its own sake, not merely as a preliminary to some future state" (266–67). This conclusion hinges on Thomas's claim that the early modern period witnessed increasing "uncertainty . . . about the prospect of heavenly reward" (266); thus, one's immortality depended on earthly fame rather than resurrection. Unfortunately, Thomas relies on questionable inferences—from clerical criticisms of *perceived* unbelief (usually a dubious source), from a supposed increase of concern for postmortem remembrance (problematicized by the plethora of ancient and medieval antecedents noted by Thomas himself), and from the "proliferation of funeral monuments." Thomas acknowledges the diversity of motives attached to postmortem remembrance (245–48), but he still feels confident in asserting that, while the trumpet-blowing angels on monuments "may possibly have been blowing the bugle of the Resurrection," they "more likely" were "sounding the trumpet of earthly Fame triumphing over Death" (247). Why should Thomas's narrative be favored over the claims made in many of his own sources, particularly if the end is to understand the latter's values? How plausible is it to separate their openly espoused beliefs from their praxis? In fact, the source of the supposed contradictions of praxis and belief, of this-worldly and other-worldly concern, is the narrative Thomas himself has introduced.

Thomas sets up, finally, a contrast between the "contentment" or limited fulfillment available to early modern English people, constrained by "an unequal and tradition-bound world," and the genuine "fulfillment" open to moderns (43). We need not deny the real oppression and suffering inflicted by early modern social structures to question whether it is appropriate for the "retrospective ethnographer" to deny genuine fulfillment to his subject, or to worry that the narrative of modern emancipation from constraints upon self-realization is not honest about the different, but still very real, constraints of our own age.

VINCENT EVENER, *Chicago, Illinois*.

VAN ENGEL, JOHN. *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. xv+433 pp. \$59.95 (cloth).

An outsider is often the obvious person to pick up a topic and bring it to a new level of analysis. This is also the case with the history of the Devotio Moderna, the reform movement that took place in the Low Countries and Rhine area in the later Middle Ages. The most cited general history of the Devotio Moderna movement is still the work by R. R. Post, dating from 1968. In the

past decades, much detailed work on the institutional and literary history of the movement has been done by Anne Bollmann, Sabrina Corbellini, Hildo van Engen, Koen Goudriaan, Wybren Scheepsmma, and Nikolaus Staubach, to name a few (continental) researchers. John Van Engen has worked together with these researchers a great deal, but his book can be characterized as coming from an American perspective, bringing a fresh and more general overview than the Dutch and German studies. He focuses on the brothers and sisters of the common life, leaving the more institutionalized branches of the movement, such as the canon(esse)s regular of the Chapter of Windesheim, aside. This is because he highlights the way the Modern-Day Devout—or converts, as he calls them with a new name—realized their ideal: a communal life without taking vows. This new name expresses, better than the regularly used “modern devout,” that “modern” does not mean “new” but rather “contemporary,” as in contrast to or even rivaling past converts (7). As a matter of fact, Van Engen does not use the term *Devotio Moderna* in his book because he concentrates on people and individual initiatives of community shaping. It is not always clear if and when he intends tertiaries, who form another branch, to be included in his argument.

Van Engen chooses to approach the Modern-Day Devout as one of the *religiöse Bewegungen* (religious movements) of Herbert Grundmann. In chapters 1–3, he treats them as part of the larger religious history since the twelfth century, especially the history of converts: people choosing a stricter way of Christian life. Only later on does he go into the details of the institutional and juridical choices they made: a very good choice, because by structuring history this way, he shows exactly the medieval character of the movement. One of the biggest pitfalls in modern research of the *Devotio Moderna* is that it is still seen as a pre-Reformation movement. Van Engen distances himself from this perspective and shows, contrarily, how the Modern-Day Devout fit perfectly in the fifteenth-century religious culture of beguines and Free Spirits. Their works and opinions show parallels with those of Luther, Ignatius Loyola, Calvin, and Erasmus, but their world was different from the world after circa 1530.

Notwithstanding the fact that they belonged to the fifteenth-century world, the Modern-Day Devout had to struggle for acceptance. They sought a way of life that was not as active in the world as that of friars and beguines, and not as traditionally withdrawn from the world as that of professed religious. Van Engen emphasizes the novelty of the Devout and makes the reader aware of the difficulties the converts faced when forming new communities. They were ridiculed by their fellow townspeople and examined by inquisitors. Van Engen also stresses the complexity of the late medieval society and the inventiveness of new groups like the Modern-Day Devout. He reads the sources written by the Devout in the light of their self-shaping and self-disciplining. Characteristic of these communities was their local organization. They were “joint-holding societies” (72), private legal arrangements under civil law, where men and women could live *like* professed religious. Notable is the fact that many more women than men joined these communities (the proportion between devout women and men was 10 to 1; between female houses and male houses, 4 or 5 to 1). Another characteristic was the central place the written word occupied in these communities. Van Engen suggests that the joint-holding may actually have begun with books, namely the private book collection of Geert Grote. Grote was the founding father of the movement, but Van Engen chooses to treat him only marginally because what Grote intended diverged from what

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eventually happened; in his view, “in reality a network of converts and organizers sprang up semi-independently” (47). Other important persons of the Devotio Moderna movement are introduced by Van Engen equally casually, when a topic needs it. This counts, for example, for Florens Radewijns, Thomas a Kempis, and Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen, who played a role in defending the movement against attacks from outside (mostly Dominicans).

While chapters 1–3 form an introduction to the movement and are restricted to the first two decades of its existence (circa 1380–1400), chapters 4–8 treat the development and self-shaping of the communities in the period from 1401 up to around 1530, after the Devout received a license from the bishop. Van Engen does not avoid treating the institution-building of the movement, against the trend of viewing religious movements in terms of charisma, body, and mystical experience. He manages to keep his general outsider’s perspective, however. He goes into more detail on the following subjects: the juridical defense of their way of life, the theology of John Pupper of Goch, who defended the nonprofessed communal life by the “Gospel law” of the Devout, and the pastoral care of fellow citizens and the reading culture of the devout. Van Engen has an eye for similarities (he compares the work of Pupper of Goch with that of Jean Gerson and John Wyclif), but also warns against transporting opinions about the Lollard case to the continental situation (271). A last positive remark is that Van Engen in most chapters sums up which kind of sources are useful for the treatment of each subject. This makes his study transparent. A negative remark is that better editing would have prevented typing errors like “mulierbus” (43) and “Gjisbert” (73), inconsistent spellings like “Bloemaert/Bloemart” (34) and “Gronendael/Groenendael” (37), and misspelled names like “Foucauld” (18) and “Kurt Goudriaan” (14).

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FERRELL, LORI ANNE. *The Bible and the People*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. xiii+273 pp. \$32.50 (cloth).

Written in connection with an exhibition at the Huntington Library and drawing on an uncommonly broad range of historical sources, *The Bible and the People* can be described as a social history of the Bible in English. It is thus the story of how the biblical text and Christian England have shaped each other over the centuries. Ferrell’s narrative is an inclusive one, with details from medieval political and social history, episodes in the history of Christian exegesis, as well as insights and speculations about religion and society more generally. The book is meant to be informative for a general readership, and an informal and engaging style places the premium on accessibility. Ferrell’s descriptions of medieval Bible making are interwoven with vignettes of civil and ecclesiastical personages, many of them now obscure, who played significant roles in the making of manuscript Bibles.

One of the more instructive aspects of Ferrell’s story is her explanation of medieval mystery plays. Popular throughout England and a set of markers for the changes of seasons, these pageants were adaptations rather than reenactments of biblical stories, and hence commentaries on the social organization and norms of the day. The plays were meant to be “a portrayal of the human condition” (53), accommodated to the understanding of the populace, which may have been illiterate but not uninformed.